For Immediate Release: June 26, 2020

Media Contact: Rachel Klein: 202-835-8373, rklein@taimail.org

THE AIDS INSTITUTE MARKS 25TH ANNUAL NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY

Washington, DC — June 27th commemorates the 25th anniversary of National HIV Testing Day (NHTD). This year’s theme “knowing” recognizes the importance of knowing one’s HIV status, why early diagnosis is needed, and available HIV testing options. NHTD 2020 occurs as the nation is facing two additional public health crises – the COVID-19 pandemic which has taken the lives of over 120,000 people in the United States just this year, and systemic racism that has taken the lives of Black people since the founding of the country.

The confluence of these syndemics is clear: HIV and COVID-19 both disproportionately impact communities of color. In the United States, Black people are diagnosed with HIV at almost twice the rate of other races, and it has been estimated that Black people in the U.S. are three and a half times as likely to die of COVID-19 than white people in the U.S.

“We must ensure that HIV and COVID-19 testing systems are comprehensive and coordinated. The first step to treating these infectious diseases is to expand access to low or no-cost testing that meets the need of each person,” said Rachel Klein, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released recommendations that all people be tested for HIV in their lifetime, with more frequent tests for people at higher risk. Since then, the CDC found that less than 40% of people in the U.S. have had an HIV test, and less than 30% of people at higher risk were tested in the last year.
“One in seven people living with HIV in the U.S. are unaware of their status. Healthcare systems have failed to implement the CDC’s recommendations, and we urge providers, state and local health departments and the federal government to ensure that these recommendations are followed,” commented Nick Armstrong, Manager of Policy and Government Affairs. “Stigma continues to be one of the strongest barriers to HIV testing, but universal, opt-out testing can help reduce stigma and connect people living with HIV to care.”

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to challenge HIV prevention activities across the country. In-person HIV testing has been reduced or stopped at many clinics, HIV prevention staff have been reassigned to respond to COVID-19, and many HIV prevention programs will face budget shortfalls in the coming months as states continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the focus on testing for COVID-19 is an opportunity to reach people who may not have been engaged with a healthcare system before. HIV prevention programs have already begun to innovate through telemedicine and at-home HIV testing.

“As COVID-19 testing and tracing programs continue to ramp up, we hope that HIV testing and screening can be integrated to reach people who have not been tested for HIV,” said Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “The same populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are disproportionately impacted by HIV. Coordination of testing is one concrete step that can make an impact.”

Testing for HIV is a main pillar for the Ending the HIV Epidemic Initiative. We now face incredible challenges but also opportunities to reaching the goal of ending HIV by 2030. We look forward to working with federal, state and local partners to combat the many public health crises impacting the communities we serve.

To learn more about HIV testing locations and at-home testing available near you, visit https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/hiv-testing/

###

The AIDS Institute is a national non-partisan, nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy, and education.

For more information and to become involved, visit www.TheAIDSInstitute.org or write to us at Info@theaidsinstitute.org, and follow The AIDS Institute on Twitter @AIDSAAdvocacy and Facebook at www.facebook.com/The-AIDS-Institute